



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

PO Box 47890 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7890

Tel: (360) 236-4501 • FAX: (360) 586-7424 • TDD Relay Service: 1-800-833-6388

October 5, 2009

Dear Community Leader:

This fall, the H1N1 (swine flu) virus that first appeared last spring is expected to make large numbers of people ill and may strain health care resources. The Washington State Department of Health, local health agencies, and health care providers must work together to limit the impact of this new flu on our communities.

Although most people who get H1N1 will become mildly ill, some are more vulnerable. Pregnant women, infants, young children, and people with certain chronic illnesses are at higher risk. Others are vulnerable because they are isolated, need extra support, or are difficult to reach with important information. Some examples are those who are culturally or geographically isolated, people with physical or developmental disabilities, residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities, and people who have difficulty understanding English.

You are a trusted resource in your community. That's why we need your help getting information about H1N1 out to at-risk populations.

There are a number of things you can do:

- Ask sick people to stay home to avoid spreading their infection.
- Encourage people to cover their coughs and wash their hands by providing adequate facilities, materials and information within your organization. Here is a link to posters that you may wish to display: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/flyers.htm.
- Reduce the risk of virus transmission by avoiding practices such as sharing cups or utensils, hand shaking, and creating crowded conditions.
- Consider informing your community that persons with certain health conditions are at higher risk of complications from seasonal or H1N1 flu and should consult their medical provider as soon as possible if they develop symptoms. These people include children under age five and people 65 or older; pregnant women; and those with asthma, diabetes, or other chronic conditions that increase a person's risk when they get the flu.
- If your organization provides childcare, please consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Guidance on Helping Child Care and Early Childhood Programs Respond to Influenza during the 2009–2010 Influenza Season*. www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/childcare/guidance.htm.
- If your organization provides homeless or emergency shelter, please consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Interim Guidance for Homeless and Emergency Shelters on the Novel Influenza A (H1N1) Virus*. www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/homeless.htm.



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- Consider recruiting volunteers to help people in your community with meals, transportation, or child care, should they be impacted by the pandemic.
- Consult the Department of Health and Human Services *Guide for Community and Faith-based Organizations* for other ideas on how to help.
www.flu.gov/professional/community/cfboguidance.html.
- Contact your local health agency to learn other ways that your organization might be able to help vulnerable people in your community.

Please forward this letter to key leaders within your organization around the state. Thank you for your help addressing the needs of vulnerable people in Washington. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Margaret Hansen, Department of Health at-risk populations coordinator, at 360-236-4026 or margaret.hansen@doh.wa.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH".

Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH
State Health Officer